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ABSTRACT

A study examined the relationship between writing ability and grades received in freshman English courses. Other variables examined in the study were year in college, major teaching area, remedial English courses taken, advanced placement in English courses, sex of the student, and cumulative grade point average. The subjects were 92 education majors randomly selected to complete a brief background survey and to write an essay demonstrating their writing ability. Two raters graded the content, structure and organization, and mechanics of each essay. When the three measures of writing ability for the total sample were correlated to the factors affecting writing ability, some of the correlations were statistically significant but none was meaningful in terms of the sample because of the low correlations. (Author/RL)

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A Study of the Relationship between College English
Grades and Writing Ability of Education Majors

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A Study of the Relationship between College English Grades and Writing Ability of Education Majors

Major Objective

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between writing ability and grades received in freshman English courses. Other variables looked at were year in college, major teaching area, remedial English courses taken, advanced placement in English courses, sex of the student, and cumulative grade-point average.

Perspective

A Berkeley study of entering college freshmen (Neill, 1976) supports the prevailing, popular theory that college students lack writing ability. In an effort to develop a basis for a screening examination for students entering the professional component of the College of Education, this study investigated whether college freshman English courses improved the writing skills of students.

Methods

Secondary and elementary education majors in their sophomore through senior years were randomly selected to complete a brief background survey and to write an essay to demonstrate their writing ability. Two raters graded each essay on content, structure and organization, and mechanics, using a pre-established scale for each area with nine representing the highest score. Each variable influencing writing ability was correlated to the total score for each rater and for the combined score for both. The test for inter-rater reliability showed that the scores for the two raters were highly correlated. The inter-class correlations are in Table 1.

Table 1
Inter-Rater Reliability

Content	.9684
Mechanics	.9356
Organization and Structure	.8874
Total	.9734

Each variable influencing writing ability was also correlated to the scores for each rater and to the total for both on content, structure and organization, and mechanics respectively. The writing score for each rater and the total for both were correlated to the grade the students received in their freshman English courses and to their cumulative grade-point averages for the overall sample and within the number of remedial English courses. All data were tested at the .05 level of significance.

Data Source

Forty elementary majors, 38 secondary majors, and 14 students who did not declare their majors were sampled for a total of 92 students from the College of Education at Louisiana State University. The sample contained 24 sophomores, 30 juniors, 36 seniors, and 2 liberal arts graduates who were taking courses leading to teacher certification. The sample contained 82 women and 10 men.

Results

When the three measures of writing ability for the total sample were correlated to the grades made in the freshman English courses (English 1001 and English 1002), the correlations for organization and structure and for mechanics were statistically significant. However, these correlations are not meaningful in terms of this sample because of the low correlation. See Table 2.

Table 2

Correlations of the Three Measures of Writing
Ability to Grade-Point Average and Grades
in English 1001 and English 1002

	Content	Organization/Structure	Mechanics	Total
GPA	0.18480	0.13375	0.02069	0.13190
GR 1001	0.12169	0.21761*	0.28389*	0.24340*
GR 1002	0.10218	0.21024*	0.22281*	0.20981*

* $P. < .05$

When the three measures of writing ability are broken down by year in school, the only statistically significant correlation is in the junior year, but again the correlation is not meaningful because of the low correlations. See Table 3.

Table 3

Correlations of the Three Measures of Writing Ability to Grade-Point Average and Grades in English 1001 and English 1002 for Junior Year in School

	Content	Organization/Structure	Mechanics	Total
GPA	0.36240	0.38333*	0.04379	0.33733
GR 1001	0.38322*	0.55032*	0.36465*	0.55132*
GR 1002	0.35453	0.50180*	0.45523*	0.56009*

* $P. < .05$

When the three measures of writing ability are broken down by elementary or secondary majors, there was no statistically significant correlation for secondary majors. A statistically significant correlation is seen between organization and structure and mechanics for the elementary majors. However, the correlation is too low to be meaningful. See Table 4.

Table 4

Correlations of the Three Measures of Writing Ability to Grade-Point Average and Grades in English 1001 and English 1002 for Elementary Majors

	Content	Organization/Structure	Mechanics	Total
GPA	0.21254	0.20536	0.09872	0.21092
GR 1001	0.08463	0.29186	0.37932*	0.30069
GR 1002	0.06809	0.31384*	0.34789*	0.28815

* $P. < .05$

Of the variables in Tables 2,3, and 4 above that are starred, the coefficient of determination (r^2) shows that, although they are statistically significant, they are not meaningful. The coefficients of determination are as shown in Table 5 for those variables that are statistically significant. See Table 5.

Table 5
Coefficients of Determination

	Content	Organization/Structure	Mechanics	Total
<u>Table 2</u>				
GR 1001		.0474	.0805	.0592
GR 1002		.0442	.0496	.0440
<u>Table 3</u>				
GPA		.1469		
GR 1001	.1468	.3028	.1329	.3039
GR 1002		.2518	.2072	.3137
<u>Table 4</u>				
GR 1001			.1438	
GR 1002		.0984	.1210	

There is no statistically significant correlation between the three measures of writing ability and grade-point average within sex, advanced placement in English, or remedial English.

Recommendations

This study indicates the need for further investigation of factors affecting the writing ability of education majors.

The findings of this study indicate a need to examine the results of the courses intended to improve student writing whether they are

remedial courses, freshman required courses, or advanced placement courses.

It recommended that the ACT score not be used as an instrument for exemption of freshman English composition courses.

It is further recommended that a screening examination should be administered to students entering the professional component of the College of Education to identify students needing remediation in writing skills.

(1). Year in College: _____

_____ Freshman
_____ Sophomore
_____ Junior
_____ Senior
_____ Other _____

(2). Teaching areas preferred: Major _____ Minor _____

(3). Grade received in :

English 1001 _____
English 1002 _____

(4). Check any of the following English courses you may have had:

0001 _____ 0004 _____
0002 _____ 0006 _____
0003 _____

(5). Did you "test out" of one or both of the freshman English courses?

English 1001 Yes _____ No _____ English 1002 Yes _____ No _____

(6). Sex: Female _____ Male _____

(7). What was your cumulative GPA as of the last semester? _____

(8). What is your Social Security number? _____

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- (9). Using what you have learned in your English courses about writing, compose an essay on the following topic:

"An Effective Teacher"